SHARING LESSONS
from the field

Gender equality in the Girls' Education Challenge

The issue of gender equality has become one of the key topics of discussion and action for the Girls' Education Challenge and is a particular focus as we move into the second phase of the programme.

This paper looks at the lessons that emerged on this topic, at the programme and project level, the adaptations that were made and examples of good practice. Importantly, it outlines the way that these lessons have been incorporated into planning and activities for the next phase of GEC work on the ground, including the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Minimum Standards[1] (see below) that have been developed to ensure consistency across the portfolio and that gender is considered at all stages of the project cycle.

Context

The vital importance of working towards gender equality across both developed and developing countries has been repeatedly highlighted by the UN and donor governments including the UK's Department for International Development. The argument for gender equality is based not only on a moral imperative and as a fundamental human right, but also as an essential part of the fight against poverty.[2]

Sustainable Development Goal Five aims to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" by

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2030, in recognition that "Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large."

This was echoed by Justine Greening MP during her time as Secretary of State for International Development: *"Empowering women — whether it's in terms of their having a voice in their community, having the choice to get an education or into a job, or having control over when they get married and how many children they have — all of that is absolutely vital for women's rights but it's also critical for successful development in the long term. (…)The UK's role as a world leader on gender equality is a personal priority for me."* [3] June 2015

The 2014 UK International Development Gender Equality Act, a bill to promote gender equality in the provision of development and

humanitarian assistance, is one of the many ways the UK government continues to lead the way in promoting gender equality globally.

Empowering women is an essential part of the battle against gender inequality. Education is key in ensuring individual, societal and national development and growth. Adolescent girls face specific challenges to staying in school and learning. In many contexts, as girls approach puberty, their opportunities can shrink compared to those of their brothers, underpinned by harmful gender norms which may impose restrictions on their mobility. Girls and young women also face a disproportionate burden of domestic work, and face greater risk of violence, including sexual violence. It is important to note that boys also face particular, but different, gendered barriers.

[1] Transition Window Grant recipient Handbook, Pg9, March 2017
[2] UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Review 2016 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002460/246045e.pdf
[3] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jun/10/justine-greening-interview-poverty-dfid-development-health-migration-empowering-women

> **"I have realised that our girls can be big leaders of the country and for this they need to be well educated."**
>
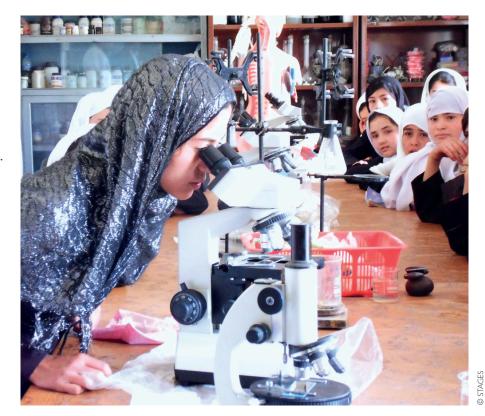> *Junior girl's parent, Link Community Development Endline Report, 2017*

Gender equality in the GEC

The focus on girls within the GEC is clear and represents an important opportunity to redress gender imbalances and to overcome the widespread marginalisation, discrimination and inequality which is experienced by girls. However, learning from the GEC to date shows that simply targeting project interventions at girls does not mean gender inequality is automatically addressed. The barriers to education that girls face are very different, depending on their personal situation and their environment. Educationally marginalised girls are not a homogenous group, and understanding the challenges they face cannot be done in isolation from the context in which they live.

The GEC Evaluation Manager noted in the midline review, *"It is also critical to understand what effects gender dynamics have on girls' education immediately and how these evolve and take effect as girls grow older. This type of gender analysis was lacking in projects' midline evaluation reports. Gender analysis and gender action planning should be at the heart of GEC project design, delivery, M&E and reporting processes. It is critical to the success of GEC projects that they are able to identify and track the extent to which girls are disadvantaged from achieving education outcomes compared to boys and how."* [4]

Applying a 'gender lens' to this issue means looking at gender norms, roles and relationships and how these impact on access to and control of services and resources as well as considering the impact of programmes and policies on the different genders and their relationships.

Learning from the GEC: Challenging our assumptions

A recent review of the GEC projects as a whole found that many projects did not place sufficient emphasis on investing in the 'environment for learning', which has the power to augment or undermine the success of the entire project. Where projects had not analysed these environments through a gender lens at the outset, they experienced significant challenges. These included community tensions due to exclusion of boys, a drop in boys' attendance rates, increased risk of bullying and violence against girl beneficiaries, and inadvertent exacerbation of gender inequalities. As a result, many projects had to take unplanned for remedial action e.g. setting up gender-based violence (GBV) reporting and referral mechanisms, at quite a late stage in the project timeframe, with limited budget and gender expertise.

> **"I took a training about girls' challenges and we got much benefit and the training was about equal right of education for girls and boys and the teacher should not take examples of successful man, so the teacher takes an example about successful girl and boy in their living system"**
>
> *Teacher, SOMGEP, Somalia*

> **"Yes, our activity has increased compared to last year. And I think this is because we are more experienced and our self-confidence has increased compared to past years. All these cause that we take more part in school shura decisions and they consider our decisions more."**
>
> *Female school shura (school council) member, Adraskan District, STAGES, Afghanistan*

There was some discussion about whether girls should be the sole focus of GEC projects. There were varying views on whether projects should engage with men and boys, or whether this was diverting resources away from the intended focus on girls. The importance of engaging with male students, teachers, family members, community and religious leaders as valid stakeholders in a girls' education project will be communicated more clearly. Specialist Gender and Social Development Advisors were deployed to support projects to develop their gender approach in GEC1. More support is planned for GECT to continue this development and ensure consistency across the portfolio.

[4] Coffey, Midline Evaluation, GEC Innovation Window

Learning from experience – project-related lessons

To date, much of the GEC's effort has been focused on addressing barriers to education that all children face, e.g. lack of schools, teaching quality, lack of materials, inability to pay school fees, etc. Where the focus has been on addressing these general barriers, projects found that, in many communities, it was not appropriate to focus their interventions solely on girls. Some projects experienced negative reactions from boys if they felt they had an equal claim to resources but weren't receiving them. Projects need to consider the implications of only focusing on girls as part of a gender analysis, especially where marginalised boys also face significant barriers to education. Ideally this analysis is undertaken while projects are being designed (see *GESI Minimum Standard 6 below*).

Barriers to girls' education:

- Early marriage
- Pregnancy
- Domestic chores
- Gender insensitive pedagogy and text books
- Social norms that do not prioritise girls' education

Barriers to boys' education:

- Pressure to support family financially including migration for work
- Engagement with militia in conflict settings

Barriers to girls' and boys' education:

- Household poverty/school-related costs
- Lack of schools or materials
- Poor teaching quality and support for teachers
- Corporal punishment or violence in school
- Violence on the way to/from school

GOOD PRACTICE

Childhope, Ethiopia

At midline it was reported that girls were experiencing anger or violence from boys who felt excluded from the project. The project's 'Good Brothers' Clubs' were used as a vehicle to explain the need for girls' education and an emphasis on the aspects of the projects the boys were benefitting from such as teacher training, were attributed as a reason for the reduction of violence. The project also included a letter link box for boys (as well as the one for girls) to be able to share their concerns and alleviate feelings of exclusion.

"Attitude change is visible. A female child never sat at the same table with males in the past. Now, she feels equal to others and do not feel ashamed about her sex."

Boys group discussion, Link Community Development Endline Report, 2017

Focusing on deep-seated structural barriers, such as gender stereotypes, harmful social norms, gender-based violence and employment opportunities for women is more likely to transform the dynamics that render girls unable to access education and learn and create sustainable change.

Some GEC projects missed opportunities to challenge gender inequality and instead risked unintentionally exacerbating it. In some cases, individuals and spaces intended to support positive change, such as mothers' groups, girls' clubs and role models, reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypes. For example, some Girls' Club activities involved cleaning schools, and mothers' clubs which were set up to support more transformational change actually reinforced traditional norms around girls' behaviour.

GOOD PRACTICE

Care, Somalia

Care have targeted deep rooted social norms through engaging with religious and community leaders. These leaders shared messages on preventing child, early or forced marriages and the value of girls' education in Friday prayers and radio shows.

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GOOD PRACTICE

I Choose Life (ICL) and Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD), Kenya

Both ICL and LCD Kenya projects invested in community initiatives that targeted fathers of girls as they saw this as a crucial part of the enabling environment for girls to attend school.

ICL Kenya worked with fathers to promote the education of their daughters in the same way they supported their sons.

LCD trained male mentors among parents of girls with disabilities to work with other fathers to get involved in the education and practical support of their daughters' education.

"Through the support that KEEP has given, we are able to do community mobilisation; we have a committee that is representative of the parents. Through those mobilisations, we pass messages that girls have a right to be educated to whatever level she wants. We also use local administrators and we tell them to report any parent who is forcing a girl into early marriages. If a community member attempts to marry off an underage girl, a neighbour will come to report that person. They know that is wrong."

Deputy Head Teacher, primary school, Wajir County, WUSC, Kenya

The vast majority of GEC projects did not collect comparative data for boys as this was not a monitoring and evaluation requirement in the first phase of the GEC. This has meant that projects have not always been able to determine the effect of their interventions on girls' learning outcomes as compared with boys nor have they always been able to understand how performance disparities have changed. However, as evidence from the GEC's Evaluation Manager indicates that between baseline to midline, girls' learning progress improved relative to boys' (for Step Change Window projects), this underlines the importance of a common approach to sex-disaggregated data and analysis across the GEC's portfolio (see *GESI Minimum Standard 7 below*).

Adapting the approach

It is clear that, in order for girls' learning to improve, gender barriers must be understood and reflected in the design and delivery of projects. Without this, projects may not achieve optimum learning outcomes and attendance, and they risk doing harm. A transformative approach to education programming involves improving marginalised girls' access to quality education, as well as supporting them, their families, schools, and communities to understand and challenge the social and gender norms that perpetuate the inequalities which marginalised girls face.

Whilst the first phase of GEC did not have formal gender equality standards, the next phase of GEC presents an important opportunity to not only set out a strategy to strengthen projects' design, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality, but also to shape the GEC as a global best practice leader on this issue in the education sector.

In light of experiences and lessons learned to date, the GEC is developing a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy which formalises the gender approach for the portfolio. The aim of this strategy is to ensure a more consistent approach to gender and social inclusion within the GEC through the introduction of minimum standards for projects and guidance on incorporating GESI considerations, including gender, into evaluation and learning.

"There is a clear expectation for GEC projects to conduct a gender analysis of the context in which they operate"

There is a clear expectation for GEC projects to conduct a gender analysis of the context in which they operate – and the beneficiaries they are targeting – at the start of their project and use this analysis to review the design of their project and underpin their Theory of Change. This approach, and an increased focus on gender equitable strategies will ultimately result in more effective, sustainable and transformative projects and adherence to principles of 'Do No Harm'.

To help measure progress, GEC projects are being benchmarked using the Gender Integration Continuum that we have adapted for the next phase of the GEC[5]. This will assess the extent to which gender has been integrated into their work. It ranges from those which are 'gender absent' (projects which have not been informed by any gender analysis and are therefore not only likely to be less effective but risk doing harm) to those which are 'gender transformative'. The category of 'gender unresponsive' acknowledges gender inequalities but does not address them. The 'gender exploitative' category is where the project takes advantage of gender inequalities and stereotypes, such as the example above of girls clubs being asked to clean classrooms, or relying too heavily on the dynamic of women as volunteers without providing them with new skills or recognition. As projects progress through implementation, this tool will be used to track progress. The expectation is that GEC projects will, at the very least, be able to demonstrate that they are 'gender accommodating' in their design. Projects will also be encouraged to aim to contribute to transformational change where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

GEC Gender Integration Continuum

GENDER ABSENT → Gender is not acknowledged or addressed

GENDER AWARE

Unresponsive
Gender inequalities **acknowledged but not addressed**

Exploitative
Gender inequalities **acknowledged but reinforced**

Accommodating
Gender inequalities addressed by responding to the **practical needs** of girls and boys

Transformative
Gender inequalities addressed by responding to the **strategic needs** of girls and boys with the aim of transforming unequal power relations

GENDER SENSITIVE

GOAL: Gender equality

[5] This model has been adapted for the GEC from the USAID Interagency Gender Working Group's Gender Integration Continuum http://www.prb.org/images/IGWG/Gender-Integration-Continuum.png 'Gender blind' has been replaced with 'gender absent'. Gender neutral is replaced by 'gender unresponsive' based on the assumption that projects cannot operate in a gender-neutral environment. Gender exploitative is featured in the Interagency continuum, and although this is clearly undesirable, it is a useful concept to be able to illustrate the risks that can occur if operating without an understanding of gender in the context. .

GEC Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Minimum Standards

1 A gender analysis of the context is conducted and used to inform the project's final design and Theory of Change.

2 Project logframes include gender-sensitive and disability-focused quantitative and qualitative indicators.

3 Bi-annual reporting includes reflections on i) progress towards meeting gender transformative standards (further guidance forthcoming) ii) extent to which activities identified and addressed barriers to inclusion and opportunities for participation for people with disabilities

4 Monitoring and evaluation processes include and differentiate girls from a variety of sub groups, **including those with disabilities,** from the start of the project. This data should track girls' experiences and whether interventions are responding to their needs.

5 A retention strategy that captures the reasons for girls' drop out from school and provides appropriate support to re-engage girls in response to the common issues is articulated in project activities.

6 Do no Harm, Child Protection and risk analyses are informed by a gender and social inclusion lens.

7 Sex, age and disability disaggregated data is collected and analysed at baseline and subsequent evaluation points.

8 Disability data differentiates between the type and severity of disability of beneficiaries.

9 The project is resourced with staff, partners and contractors who have appropriate gender and social inclusion expertise.

10 Lesson learning and sharing of best practice captures achievement towards i) gender equitable and transformative outcomes and ii) the inclusion and participation in planning, implementation and M&E of people with disabilities.

Building on the portfolio-wide lessons and assessment, the GEC's next phase will focus on the following GESI strategic objectives:

Objective 1: To raise the GEC portfolio's performance on gender equality and social inclusion, including providing ongoing strategic and technical leadership on GESI

Objective 2: To monitor and assess project adherence to GESI Minimum Standards

Objective 3: To facilitate the wide sharing of lessons learned on gender equality and social inclusion within the GEC

The Girls' Education Challenge has a zero tolerance policy on misconduct, including mistreatment of individuals and misappropriation of funds. If you would like more information on the whistle-blowing mechanism, or to report misconduct please email gecpmo@uk.pwc.com. The e-mail account is accessible only by a small number of individuals who have been trained on the requirement to keep the information confidential. We will follow up matters on an anonymous basis and are committed to investigate claims thoroughly and fairly.

Girls' Education Challenge

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Contact us:
Email: girlseducationchallenge@uk.pwc.com | Tel: +44 (0)20 7213 5969

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